



WASHINGTON COURTS

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE COURTS

Jeff Hall
State Court Administrator

May 19, 2010

TO: Certified and Registered Court Interpreters

FROM: Katrin Johnson *KJ*
Court Interpreter Program Coordinator

RE: COURT INTERPRETER OATH

In your experience as a courtroom interpreter, you have likely undergone different requirements for the interpreter oath. Some courts adopted the principal of "permanently" swearing-in interpreters, while other courts administered the oaths regularly, and others never administered any oath. This matter came to the attention of judicial branch leadership in 2009 due to an unpublished Court of Appeals case that stated there is no legal basis for "permanently" swearing-in interpreters.

In response, the judicial associations endorsed amending the current statute regarding the interpreter oath. At the close of this year's legislative session, Governor Gregoire signed into law House Bill 2518, which amends RCW 2.43.050 and requires all certified and registered court interpreters to biannually file a signed interpreter oath with the Administrative Office of the Courts. The new statutory language is the following:

RCW 2.43.050

- (1) *Upon certification or registration and every two years thereafter, certified or registered interpreters shall take an oath, affirming that the interpreter will make a true interpretation to the person being examined of all the proceedings in a language which the person understands, and that the interpreter will repeat the statements of the person being examined to the court or agency conducting the proceedings, in the English language, to the best of the interpreter's skill and judgment. The administrative office of the courts shall maintain a record of the oath in the same manner that the list of certified and registered interpreters is maintained.*

- (2) *Before any person serving as an interpreter for the court or agency begins to interpret, the appointing authority shall require the interpreter to state the person's name on the record and whether the person is a certified or registered interpreter. If the interpreter is not a certified or registered interpreter, the interpreter must submit the interpreter's qualifications on the record.*
- (3) *Before beginning to interpret, every interpreter appointed under this chapter shall take an oath unless the interpreter is a certified or registered interpreter who has taken the oath within the last two years as required in subsection (1) of this section. The oath must affirm that the interpreter will make a true interpretation to the person being examined of all the proceedings in a language which the person understands, and that the interpreter will repeat the statements of the person being examined to the court or agency conducting the proceedings, in the English language, to the best of the interpreter's skill and judgment.*

Please note that Chapter 2.43 applies exclusively to courtroom interpreting, and the references to "certified" and "registered" signify interpreters certified or registered by the Washington Administrative Office of the Courts.

Due to this statutory change, the Interpreter Commission has revised the interpreter program policies, and completing the oath is now a requirement for maintenance of the certification or registered credential.

There are two ways in which you can complete the interpreter oath: 1) bring the enclosed oath form to a court and request that the oath be administered by a judge, or 2) sign the oath before a notary public. In either case, you are required to complete the oath and return it to the Administrative Office of the Courts no later than June 10, 2010. Please return your sworn oath form to:

Administrative Office of the Courts
Court Interpreter Program
Attn: Tina Williamson
PO Box 41170
Olympia, WA 98504-1170

Failure to return a sworn oath may result in your name being removed from the directory of certified or registered court interpreters located on the AOC's website, or other disciplinary sanctions.

As the statutory language indicates, interpreters will be required to file an oath on a biannual basis. For future years, we will include the oath with the process for filing continuing education credits. Therefore, your next signed oath will be due on December 31, 2011.

Thank you for your cooperation in this matter, and please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or concerns at (360) 704-4062 or Katrin.Johnson@courts.wa.gov.